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ABSTRACT

Multiculturalism (like crossculturalism and transculturalism) is an emergent, interdisciplinary concept--one that is rife with images. The metaphoric language of "why" (embrace multiculturalism) is filled with arguments for or against multiculturalism paired with problems and burdens, coupled with disease, and most frequently, troped as war (for example "academic death squads," "generals," and "fire-breathing faculty"). The metaphors describing multicultural curricula are more varied than those of the debate for or against it. They include metaphors of body, nature, food, property, architecture, and motion. Because multiculturalism has no referent, to work toward defining it involves considering what it is not. It is not a solution; it is a strategy for change. It is a capacity, an emergent interdisciplinary concept that will be invented and defined in terms of what it is, what it is not, and how a multicultural curriculum might look. (NH)

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TROPING THROUGH THE MIRE: LANGUAGE OF THE MULTICULTURAL CURRICULA DEBATE

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Wittgenstein said "To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life." The way we use language, goes the argument, will determine, to a considerable extent, the way we talk about, write about, and enact a world. I want to look at the ethical dimensions of language use, particularly the language of multiculturalism--the arguments surrounding it, the organizing tropes for curricula, and the stakes for doing or undoing it.

I'm speaking of a version of language that assumes a literary sense of the world, a version where imaginative powers of language take hold, and language can be measured not by its truth-value but by its appropriateness to a context. Since this view engages in metaphors, it can't escape subjectivity. But beyond that imaginative and playful notion of metaphor is another dimension: metaphor as argument. In this view, language takes on a performative aspect. Metaphors are no longer just representations of what really happens out there. They are a way of seeing, making sense of, and acting in the world. And they are multi-directional--implicit about their sites of origin (the ideologies that spawn them) and their destinations (how multicultural curricula might look and what the stakes are).

Our theory of language can reveal the textual power of the multicultural curricula debate. Examining metaphors as arguments help us see what Robert Scholes calls textuality: how these texts

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become part of readers' consciousness, how they present and repress ideas, mold and mar human experiences, or even obscure the very textuality of their texts thus making them appear neutral and natural. If, as Richard Rorty suggests, pictures, not propositions, metaphors not statements determine our philosophical convictions, then metaphors are powerful ways of shaping our conduct and our convictions. As such, they can also be damaging. For example, Meryl Altman in "How Not to Do Things With Metaphors We Live By," shows us how metaphors have been a key aspect of oppressive language for women (recall Annette Kolodny's work on how the American landscape has been troped as female, then held up as Virgin Mother, then as place to rape and pillage--metaphors damaging both to environmental policy and to women). Metaphor as I am using it, then, is not just a formal figure of speech; it is a rhetorical strategy. It suggests a literary view of language and of life but with the force of argument. Altman goes on to suggest that while we are seduced by metaphors, we should also remember that people in power are the ones who get to impose metaphors; indeed, metaphors are part of a power struggle. She pleads for a "vigilant" awareness of the powers and limits of metaphors. With that warning, let's take a "therapeutic" look at the metaphors of multiculturalism, with thought to their origins and destinations.

The language of <u>why</u> (embrace multiculturalism) is far different than the language of <u>how</u> (to organize the curriculum). Implied in both narratives (some of which overlap) are arguments.

First Why. Whether I read about multiculturalism in the popular or professional literature, attend workshops on multiculturalism in my own community and university or on a national level, I repeatedly hear arguments for or against multiculturalism paired with problems and burdens, coupled with disease, and most frequently, troped as war. To run through the list of war images, then, we have "academic death squads," "generals," and "fire-breathing faculty," "battle lines clearly drawn" and the "DMZ precariously narrow," "smoke from bomb shells cloud the field," we "win a battle but lose the war," we have "cannons aimed at traditional canons" as these "instruments of destruction roll on decks of a fragile academic ship as it tosses in a sea of controversy," we have "loose objects flying through the air," "turf wars," and the "Tower of Babel story" retold through a conventional lens, "curriculum as the battlefield of multiculturalism," "multiculturalism spreading like wildfire," "canon busting," "canon scrimmages," and "canon fodder," Everyone wants to play "peacemaker" bringing once and for all a "truce" to the wars. Most recently, I read that "the war is over; multiculturalism has won." So let's unpack the metaphors:

> multiculturalism and curricular debate are high stakes, worth carving out a territory for and defending it with your life
>
> blood will be spilled and some will be innocent victims caught in the cross-fire or even hit by friendly fire--
>
> all other forms of communication have been exhausted-- this is war which requires brute force and armed aggression to "restore peace"
>
> there will be a victor and a loser

> when the war is over, boundaries will necessarily change because of force
>
> there is a hierarchy of power: generals and troops, healers and diplomats, peacemakers

So what do we make of this trope? How did this happen? Obviously we need better metaphors for talking about conflict. H.L. Mencken said "Academic in-fighting is so vicious because the stakes are so low." We might reply with "Yes, but they are the only stakes we have." For a start, Linda Flower's work on the construction of negotiated meaning and on rival hypothesis theory--rivaling, for short--offer alternative and less agonistic strategies and language for dealing with conflicts. At any rate, working on curriculum changes, suggesting multicultural focuses, are not "warlike" things to do. Curriculum is hardly static. Revising it is old news. In the 1920's and 30's we engaged in a similar battle: to include American literature in the college English curriculum. An important thing to grasp, then, is that change does not equal loss. Another problem has been the media. As Huntly Collins reports, the "egghead beat" (those reporters who cover higher education and scholarship for the popular press) has "come belatedly to critical theory" and they've simply not done their homework. They've covered multiculturalism poorly. Indeed, we have an "ahistorical press." OF course the "eggheads" themselves have not responded well. We've been speaking "tribal talk" (as Jim Corder would say), a language "not commodious" enough to effectively communicate with the popular press or the majority of people in this country. (I recently heard Mary Pratt

say her goal is to get an article printed in an airline magazine.) Of course few of us get release time from our universities and colleges to prepare careful responses, to appear on national television or conduct interviews with Newsweek or Time, nor do we get financial support to hire a public relations firm to help us engage in "peace talks." Last, there are the politicians and all the complications of the asymetrical power relationship, making us feel like either "POWs" or "guerrillas." So the attacks between the politicos, the powerful, the press, and the professors have made us feel like victims whose territories are invaded. Some of us go underground to do our job, which has always involved changing the curriculum anyhow (in a war, we're called "subversives"), while others "fight fire with fire." This is not troping through mire; this is troping through minefields (sorry, Annette). In terms of the direction of the trope, it has come from polarized ideologies representing far different visions of education, democracy, and the shape of the future. As far as where it is going, we only know that "wars" leave survivors who are physically and psychologically maimed, landscapes that may never recover. So much for this metaphor.

Second How. The metaphors describing multicultural curricula are more varied than those of the debate for or against it. Just as cultural literacy has been called "voodoo education," multiculturalism is viewed as "cultish" and "seductive," suggesting a loss of free will, a great "culture scam." Surely if we only knew better we would have not allowed ourselves to become

brainwashed. Then there are "body" tropes. Not just the "dead or maimed bodies" from the "wars," but "bodies of knowledge" and "bodies of texts" (suggesting literature and curriculum is something fixed, readily accessible, situated within clearly defined boundaries). As a new trope for curriculum, "conversations among voices" has been offered in place of "body of knowledge/literature". But that, too, is problematical. As Gerald Graff has pointed out, conversation connotes serenity, a calm, quiet "give and take." Surely our classrooms will not/should not be so harmonious. Multiculturalism means motion and diversity means conflict, but the point is, it doesn't have to mean war. Continuing with body metaphors, on a global level, we all have "one human heart," we're a "family" and if you "cut the body we bleed."

There are metaphors of nature: besides NCTE's "rainbows" and Robert Scholes' "flock of cultures," there are "trees" for culture, "roots, branches, and leaves" for assumptions, "seeds" for behavior (suggesting a hopeful possibility for growth and change). On the more brutal side, we have "corrupting carcasses" and "rotting carcasses" (that's Western Civ, of course). Sorry to ruin your appetite, food metaphors are next. I realize these are almost "leftovers" by now: melting pots (which boil up, melt down), stew pots (separate and equal), salad bars (ah, something for everyone--unless you want meat), stir fry (with a unifying sauce, of course), cultural communion wafers (spiritually cleansing if only you believe), all "antidotes to educational

poisons." We've suffered "acid attacks" on multiculturalism, and we all know that "bad economic times fertilize bitter fruit."

Next the property and ownership metaphors see culture as capital, the university as "intellectual marketplace" or "tabernacle?" There are two problems with these metaphors. First, one of the rationales for a multicultural curricula has been the belief that America is more diverse racially and culturally. But during the decade from 1978-1988, the U.S. Department of Education reports that minority enrollment increased only 2 percent in higher education, from 16 to 18 percent ["Update" section of the November-December 1990 issue of Academe (The Bulletin of the American Association of Unversity Professors)]. And just last month, Harper's (March 1993:28) reported that the Census Bureau projects this country will maintain roughly its present racial proportions well into the next century. And that brings us to the second problem with culture as capital metaphors. The real change in the U.S., if we want to get Marxist about things, has been economic: the gap between the top and bottom fifths of the population is bigger than, well, the "Grand Canyon" to get metaphorical. But in spite of widespread claims about its effects, multiculturalism is not a solution, it is a strategy, just like affirmative action. It will not solve the socioeconomic problems of this country or the world. Nor will it necessarily make higher education more diverse in terms of human populations.

Then there are the human constructs: Charlotte Pierce-

Baker's "quilts" has possibilities (with uneven stitches, and patches of velvet sewn next to denim); NYC's Mayor David Dinkins' "mosaics" breaks down (separate pieces fixed firmly and separated by cement); Johnella Butler's and Betty Schmitz' "kaleidoscopes" seems to work (moving field of color and complexity yet presenting patterns both understandable and capable of being communicated). Finally, the metaphors of architecture, remind us of Gaston Bachelard's Poetics of Space, the phenomenology of images, particularly those of felicitous space (those places that "seek to determine the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, . . .the space we love" (1969:xxxi). Attached to multiculturalism, the images of place range from "lofty ivory towers" to "cold, warehouses," "basements" full of the stuff of Renato Rosaldo's "garage sales" where "culture flows freely and from unlikely places," or "attics" which contain the discarded antiques, the dusty throwaways but also provide a quiet space to reflect on the past, to re-vision it even; to Rosaldo's "art museums" where cultures and texts are held up as monuments, or kept safely under glass, behind lock and key, preserved carefully for posterity, please "don't touch." We have courses like "gay and lesbian studies" or "black studies" which make multiculturalism a "single analytical room." And we have Houston Baker's more "porous structural arrangements" of those Other Americas: "hogans, pueblos, mesas, and southwest ramadas" (for those of you who don't know, a minimally framed patio with access to the best breezes), where ideas and visions and sounds from

various cultures can wash over you, where the future academy, like the curriculum, is, to quote Baker, a "bright open-air gathering place for the convivial exchange of different stories." What do we do about America's traditional structures, the "forts, mansions, Wall Street skyscrapers, ranches, vanishing farmhouses, burgeoning tenements?" Gather under the "ramada" and take a fresh look...?

Normally, the metaphors of motion are particularly apt for talking about multiculturalism: its stories and its organizing tropes. But even motion metaphors have problems. Circles have "margins" and "centers" but at least they can overlap and "borders" can be blurred. Canons "rise and fall," "give and take," "open and are undone." Unfortunately, what goes up can also come down. Stay away from vertical metaphors. Elevators take us from the "basement to the penthouse" or from "low to high culture." Of course you can get off on Dinesh D'Souza's "middle ground." This assumes you realize there is a "high" and a "low" ground, presumably extreme positions. Arranging space linearly means American campuses can "fall from grace," can engage in "pitfalls of nostalgia," our very own Paradise Lost.

Curriculum can be organized by metonym (part to part) or synecdoche (part to whole). Just don't do it digitally (either-or, on-off). Try to think in terms of the analog (more-less, hotter-colder), says Arnold Krupat (in his work on the canon and Native American literature). And all these tropes assume multiple sites of destination. Multicultural curricula is said to have

far-reaching effects. The ends of the means vary depending on your ideology. Opponents warn us it will: propagandize, polarize, politicize, assimilate, decenter, homogenize difference, sloganeer, and separate; Proponents say it should: teach the conflicts, be polyvocal and relational, revolve around core lists and common elements, transform, syncretize, illuminate conflict and differences not dissolve them, improve self-esteem, promote heterodoxy, coalesce, promote a global society. Is it a pedagogy of the oppressed? or the distressed?

So my point is this: multiculturalism has no referent. As we work toward defining it, we might consider what it is not: as I said earlier, it is not a solution, it is a strategy for change. Nor is it just a thing that we can construct, it is a capacity. Multiculturalism (like crossculturalism, transculturalism) is an emergent, interdisciplinary concept--one that is rife with images. The future will be a time of inventing, defining, and imagining multiculturalism as we come to understand what it is, what it is not, and how a multicultural curriculum might look. Some images will work better than others. If imagining a language is imagining a form of life, we are surely susceptible to the image. But we should also expose the intellectualism of the metaphor. Questions we should always ask, then, include "Who speaks? When and Where? With or to whom? Under what institutional and historical constraints? Finally, the very idea of learning other ways of knowing the world--at the heart of multiculturalism--has brought more voices into the dialogue and

has offered "multicultural metaphors," if you will.

Just as Houston Baker's multicultural approach to architecture produced the ramada image of a future academy, a place that leaves us open "to a repertoire of influences stealing over us with the brisk clarity of moonlight" (writes Baker), so too, Edward Said's "migrant" or "traveler" becomes a model for teachers and students in an academically free world. As "migrant travellers," we can discover and travel (metaphorically) among our selves, other identities, experience jointly the varieties of the human adventure, and transform conflict into reconciliation or creative interaction (pp. 17-18). Under the ramada, perhaps.

Another metaphor I like comes from Anthropology Professor Arjun Appadurai, who envisions the world in terms of landscapes--what he calls "global ethnoscapes" whereby people make up shifting worlds: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups. To Appadurai, this allows not for one way but for two way movement. He argues that "More people are in some sense where they do not belong than ever before...but even those who have not moved are in some sense in greater contact with those who have."

There is Mary Pratt's "contact zones," those places of overlap that become models of community: "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world" (34). The pedagogical arts of the contact zone

might be as diverse as a global culture, and will wash refreshingly over us, seated under ramadas, travelling from place to place, moving around in a moving field, telling stories.

Kenneth Burke was interested in how received structures shape human conduct and how human conduct alters received structures. As we question the directions of the metaphor, let us remember again its limits, particularly when looking at images from other cultures. What happens, for example, in the "contact zone" when one way of imagining a world encounters another? Is it "coopted" by an alternative way of imagining a world? Or is a new synthesis possible? Renato Rosaldo cautions: we "cannot. . . simply use our imaginations to invent other cultural worlds...human imaginations are as culturally formed as distinctive ways of weaving, performing a ritual, raising children, grieving, or healing, they are specific to certain forms of life (1989:25-26). In other words, it's like the bumper sticker--THINK GLOBALLY, ACT LOCALLY.

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